

In the elysium of the snow

Autor(en): **Landa, M.J.**

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IN THE ELYSIUM OF THE SNOW

Winter-Sporting in Switzerland is now a regular feature of English life. It is extending to all classes. It is as indispensable to many town dwellers and sedentary workers as is the weekly golf. It is a boon, an invigorating institution, to increasing numbers—not merely a break in the drear and bleak monotony of the English winter, in which frost and snow are becoming abnormalities, but a real means of taking a holiday when the body, the nerves and the mind most need the refreshing stimulant.

And such a holiday! Anybody can take a holiday in summer, and almost anywhere. The world is one's oyster then. But the stress of life, the imperious demand of the work of the world to be done, makes holiday impossible for all in the summer. Besides, the nerve-strain makes two holidays imperative to many—two in one, in actuality, for there is a growing tendency to split up the annual vacation. With the facilities in Switzerland for the fullest utilisation of the winter portion, it is becoming the holiday of the year to lots of people. It is not merely a break for recuperation, an opportunity for the purpose of "oiling up", or lazing; it affords a real and a complete change, a perfect transformation to something absolutely outside the possibilities of existence in England.

"Why!" exclaimed an enthusiast, after his first visit to Switzerland in winter, "it has completely altered my concept of Paradise! Elysian fields for me in future are gorgeous slopes of snow under a caressing sun. That's the angel-whiteness I would depict were I to attempt to create a Paradise with pen or pencil, or brush. And snow! I've seen snow for the first time—real snow, the sort of thing that's been reserved for the Christmas cards hitherto, the sort that exists in the mass—miles of it, and tons of it on the tree branches."

Such language is neither unusual nor hyperbolic. The startling contrast between England in December, January and February, even without rain, or drizzle or fog, and with some snow and ice, and the Swiss resorts at the same period is overwhelming. The mere visual aspect has a thrilling effect. And then the benefit in the dull time before stock-taking, or the usually wearisome days after it, or following the strenuous Christmas business rush—it is something to be remembered. To many, professional men and women particularly, this period at the turn of the year is the only time when they can really take a holiday.

And so the ski is more and more becoming part of the Englishman's and Englishwoman's outfit; the skates do not get rusty and forgotten for lack of use but once in several years. Nor is anyone surprised nowadays when old Jones at the club—sixty if he's a day!—regards the drizzle outside the window with nonchalance, and says, casually, "In forty-eight hours, I shall be skating".

His comrades look on with envy. Old Jones indulges in scarcely any exercise in London; he has been known to take a taxi to cross Hyde Park Corner in the height of the season, so nervous is he. And so punctilious is

he in the matter of his clothes that he would regard himself as nude were he to emerge, by accident, from his home without a collar or tie. Yet in forty-eight hours he will be accoutred more like a stage Highlander or Miss Beatie Fluff in the latest revue, without compunction, without feeling awkward and without exciting wonderment or mirth. Nay more, he will be happy, hygienically encased and comfortable—much more so, he frankly admits, than when perfectly tailored for the Park by a Saville Row expert.

Not merely does old Jones skate. Precise and prim at home, with never the slightest deviation from the strictest path of convention, he has been known to engage in a Honeymoon Race in Switzerland with a blue-eyed little Miss of nine as a partner! And he himself rehearsed all over again his struggles to thrust his "engaging embonpoint" into the slim skirt she provided so that it should be duly kodaked! Moreover, has he not gone the whole hog in the indoor revelry after the glorious dark orange glow has faded from the western sky and night has suffused the dazzling whiteness with poetic radiance? Was it not he who won the prize in the sheet and mask ball for a weird and fantastic get up made of a confectioner's brown paper bag—with the name across his nose—and the sheets taken from his bed and fastened with safety-pins about him in a veritable cubist pattern?

Serious-minded ski champions, skaters, curlers and others are apt to cavil at the over-running of their favoured resorts by those who go avowedly for the fun they get. But then, this is one of the great attractions for vast numbers. The air is so bracing, so exhilarating, that they cannot but feel impelled to plunge into the gaiety of the life. It is so much more alluring than the heat of the summer. Dancing, fancy-dress entertainments, gymkhanas, and the like are so much more natural thousands of feet above the sea-level. It is all so novel to stand bareheaded on the ice and snow and get sunburnt, so entrancing to enjoy the sensation of speed in the health-giving atmosphere, so delightful to undertake the unconventional methods of locomotion—lugeing, tobogganing, tailing, ski-kjöring, ice-cycling and bob-sleighing. Merely to look on, for those who cannot participate, is in itself thrilling. There is such abundance in the bonspiel, in the racing, in the comic competitions, the ladies bottle and hockey—stick contests, for instance, the real hockey, the championships, and, most wonderful of all, the ski-jumping. The feast is never-ending, and when the day is waning, what a delicious glory there is in the winter sunset. The subtle half-tones of the snowscape are enchanting as they melt into the all-enveloping shroud of night. All too swiftly the profound shadows of the valleys are folded within the darkening embrace. Peak after peak and range beyond range merge silently into the deepening cowl of the firmament. The silver crests are haunted for a brief moment by the fading colours until the whole is couched in mystery and magic.



*Die Olympiadesiegerin Sonja Henie in St. Moritz / Sonja Henie, lauréate du patin aux Jeux olympiques de St-Moritz
The Olympian Lady Champion at St-Moritz / La vincitrice dei giochi olimpici di St. Moritz, Sonja Henie*

Phot. Rutz, St. Moritz



An den Schneehängen von Caux . *Phot. Kern, Lausanne*
Sur les pentes neigeuses de Caux / On the snow slopes of Caux / Sui nevosi declivi di Caux



Im Sportgebiet des Moléson *Phot. Kern, Lausanne*
Le Moléson et sa région des sports / In the sport district of the Moleson / Nella regione sportiva del Moléson



Davos

Phot. Meerkämper, Davos



Engelberg

Phot. Trottmann, Engelberg



*Das Schneereich der Montreux-Oberland-Bahn | La magnifique contrée de sports sur le parcours du Montreux-Oberland
The snow realm of the Montreux-Oberland Railway
Magnifico panorama invernale nella regione della ferrovia Montreux-Oberland
Phot. Klopfenstein, Adelboden*



*In den märchenhaften Wäldern des Jura | Dans les féériques forêts du Jura
In the Fairy Woods of the Jura | Nelle foreste del Giura
Phot. Seitz, Les Brenets*

No visitor leaves Switzerland without a sigh. The memory of the winter interlude, its ecstasy of the days, followed by the merriment of the long, snug evenings within doors, is a treasure that lingers. Bronzed and rejuvenated the traveller returns to talk of the joys of Andermatt or Arosa, Campfèr and Caux, Davos and Diablerets, Engelberg and the Engadine, Grindelwald and Gstaad, Klosters and Kandersteg, Lenzerheide and Lenk, Mürren and Montana; these and others all have their appeal and their special devotees. From Adelboden to Zweisimmen, from A to Z there is pleasant play upon the whole gamut of the emotions. Annually the list of visitors is lengthened. Few can resist the fascination. The spell is not easily broken. Its duality is irresistible. The outdoor life is not the commonplace transference of summer to the winter months as in the Riviera, or similar resorts; it is a buoyant existence in a Fairyland that combines the summer sun with a dazzling winter landscape, health-giving with its rich tonic of purest air, infinite in its opportunities for enjoyment and exercise. Indoors, it is a prolonged Christmas entertainment—in all respects an ideal and resourceful holiday.

Thereafter, it is a precious keepsake, a storehouse of exquisite daydreams. The recollection of the sense of easy motion across the ice, of the swift ski-glide, or the rush of the sleigh down the bounteous snow-slope brings a contentment that is a new pleasure. The *bonne camaraderie* of the experience imparts a zest to mundane affairs that dispels all pessimism. It is a refilling of the cup of youth with all its glow and optimism. To the jaded it brings exaltation, later conjuring up roseate visions whenever pictures are seen recalling the vivacious hours in the wonderland of the snow regions. The greatest marvel of all is the fact that year by year the heights are brought nearer and within the reach of all. Not alone is space annihilated. Accessibility is not solely a matter of transport; it has been extended to the purse. Pontresina has long been a suburb of Piccadilly, but to-day Balham is as near to the Bernina and Wengen within the capacity of Wandsworth. There is no reason to-day why the affinity between Mayfair and Maloja or Morgins should not be extended to a connection between Camden Town and Champéry. The horizon of the summer has expanded to the winter.

M. J. Landa.

LO SPORT DEGLI SKI

La neve! Ogni anno, al declinare dell'autunno in una serie di giornate imbronciate spandenti tristezza e noia, se ne aspetta, se ne invoca la prima comparsa quasi una liberazione. E la si saluta da tutti, piccini e grandi, sui monti, nelle campagne, nelle città, con vivo giubilo, come una promessa. Promessa di godimenti nuovi, di sensazioni particolari, di diletto vario. I ragazzi la palpano, la palleggiano, la plasmano, scorrazzano sul soffice tappeto e sognano le belle partite di slitta sui vicini pendii. I grandi, chiusi tutto il giorno, tutti i giorni feriali nell'opificio, nel fondaco, nell'ufficio, costretti ad una diuturna attività febbrile, la guardano, la sentono cadere benefica ed anelano il giorno di riposo per respirare a pieni polmoni aria purissima, fuori, all'aperto, nella natura libera, lontano da ogni trambusto urbano, sullo strato carezzevolmente gelido della bianca meteora che attutisce tutti i rumori, sotto un tersissimo cielo turchino.

In attesa del giorno auspicato, è tutto un affaccendarsi in preparativi: concertare gite, escursioni, partite sportive, preparare il sacco ben rifornito d'alimenti, ma soprattutto verificare attentamente e mettere di tutto punto gli ski: scivolare sulle neve rapidi e leggeri, come portati dal vento, che delizia! E non è poca cosa la certezza di rifornirsi di salute, di resistenza, di pace? Un giorno, due giorni lontano dagli affari, dalle preoccupazioni ed anche dai comodi della vita, esposti alla sferza della borea temperata dal vivo calore solare alpestre, bastano a ritemperare il cittadino, ad infondergli gioia e tranquillità, a ridargli novella forza per assolvere il quotidiano compito con ilarità e senza pena.

La società moderna e l'economia pubblica molto de-

vono allo sport, in particolare allo sport invernale — slitta, pattini, ski —: gli sono debitori della freschezza di corpo e di mente di tutti i lavoratori esplicitanti la loro attività in locali chiusi nel lungo melanconico periodo jemale.

La nostra Svizzera è il paese per eccellenza degli sport d'inverno. Di tutti gli sports. Dello ski in ispecie. Lo sviluppo preso da questo negli ultimi anni è davvero prodigioso.

Se ne incominciò a parlare in principio del secolo. Destò dapprima curiosità, poi interesse, infine passione. Ci veniva dai paesi nordici, ove l'inverno è tanto lungo e la neve abbondante. Ma anche da noi si trova l'inverno assai lungo e di neve non ne manca sui pendii dei monti, nelle alte valli, sulle Alpi. Quei pattini lunghissimi di sottili striscie di legno, di forma aggraziata, esposti nelle vetrine dei negozi di articoli sportivi, parevano dire alla gioventù desiosa di novità e d'avventure: prendici, portaci su in alto sui monti, in cima ad una distesa di alta neve, poi ci calzerai e noi ti procureremo vivo godimento che ti compenserà ad usura della fatica.

Non già che in passato non si sia mai ricorso a mezzi per camminare sulla neve soffice. Zoccoloni a larga suola, assicelle rettangolari assicurate alle scarpe permettevano di non affondare nei mucchi di neve. Da secoli gli abitanti della penisola scandinava, del nord della Russia e dell'Asia settentrionale e centrale si servono, per camminare rapidi sulla neve, di una calzatura speciale su dischi di legno. Ne fa cenno Senofonte (370 av. Cr.) quando parla degli Armeni ed anche Strabone (18 d. Cr.) narrando degli abitanti del Caucaso. Ancora